

What to do with all those leaves you rake this autumn

The glorious colors of the autumn leaves are enjoyed by all. Homeowners, however, are not always so enthusiastic about leaves once they have fallen and cover all parts of the garden, driveway and paths. What to do?

While fallen leaves may provide a good mulch on flower beds, it is important to remove them from lawn areas where they encourage the presence of mice and other rodents which can do extensive damage to turf. A mat of wet leaves can also aid the growth of grass-killing fungi.

Canadian Garden Council

If the property is large, or even not so large, but dominated by one or several large shade trees, there will be great numbers of leaves. For many homeowners, the gathering of the leaves, while it may seem a chore, is not nearly as large a concern as the actual disposal of them. Many municipalities, where landfill site availability is becoming a problem, are no longer picking up leaves, grass

clippings, and other garden trash as part of the normal weekly service.

A practical alternative is for homeowners to compost their own leaves in a remote or out-of-the-way corner of their property. While there are several commercial composting units available, none of these is really suitable for composting the great quantities of leaves with which most home-

owners must deal each autumn. The answer is a special composting area for leaves. Choose a corner of the garden out of sight, possibly heavily shaded. The composting can be done in trenches dug into the soil, but the best method is to construct a simple bin.

One method that is simple is to use three standard wood pallets used for shipping many goods, and often available for the taking from industrial parks in cities. Nail the three pallets together to form a "U" shape, set on the ground with one open side. For fastest composting, before putting the leaves in the bin, pile them in thick layers on the driveway, and run the rotary lawn mower (set at its lowest setting) over them several times in all directions. There are also small shredders available made especially for shredding leaves.

Once the leaves have been chopped up with the rotary mower, it's time to add them in layers to the compost bin. Make each layer about 15-20 cm (6-8 inches). On top of each layer place a three cm (one inch) layer of garden soil, and some animal manure, or handful of high nitrogen (NOT slow release) fertilizer. Nitrogen is the first number in the

formula on fertilizer bags, and is the ingredient on which the bacteria and other decomposition organisms feed.

Continue to pile the leaves to at least a height of one metre or even higher, being sure to alternate with the soil and manure or nitrogen fertilizer. The pile will work best if it is moist; usually the autumn rains provide sufficient. If it becomes dry, a hose soaking is in order. If the pile is not frozen a month after the leaves have been stacked, it should be turned in order to get air to the centre. The turning can be a chore, so an alternative is to install plastic piping, that is drilled with holes its entire length, up through the centre of the pile.

Next spring, examine your pile, and turn it again. Depending on: 1) the type of leaves (oak is the slowest to compost), 2) the amount of reduction by shredder or lawn mower, and 3) the efficiency of the pile, particularly the air from turning; your leaves may be suitable for use as garden compost as soon as the following autumn, or it may take one more year. Regardless of how long, you'll have one of nature's finest soil conditioners and organic matter to add to your garden at literally no cost.

ADDITIONAL SPACE



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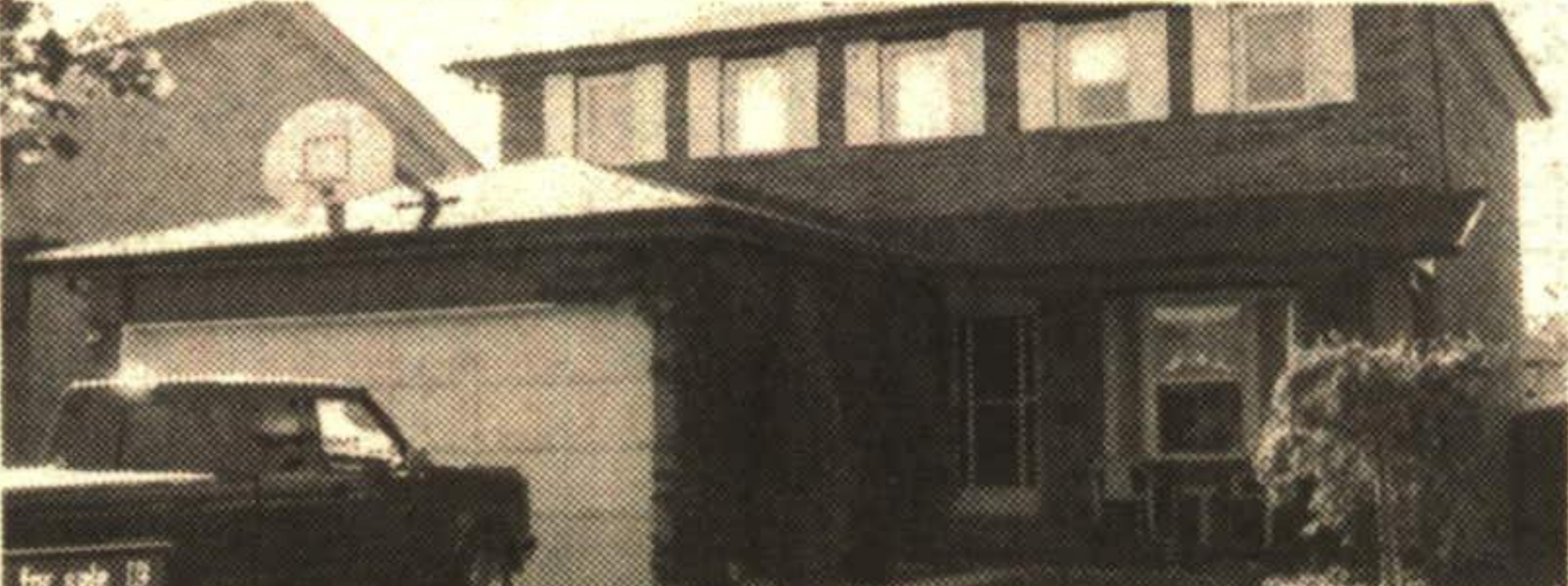
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HIGH ATOP THE RAVINE



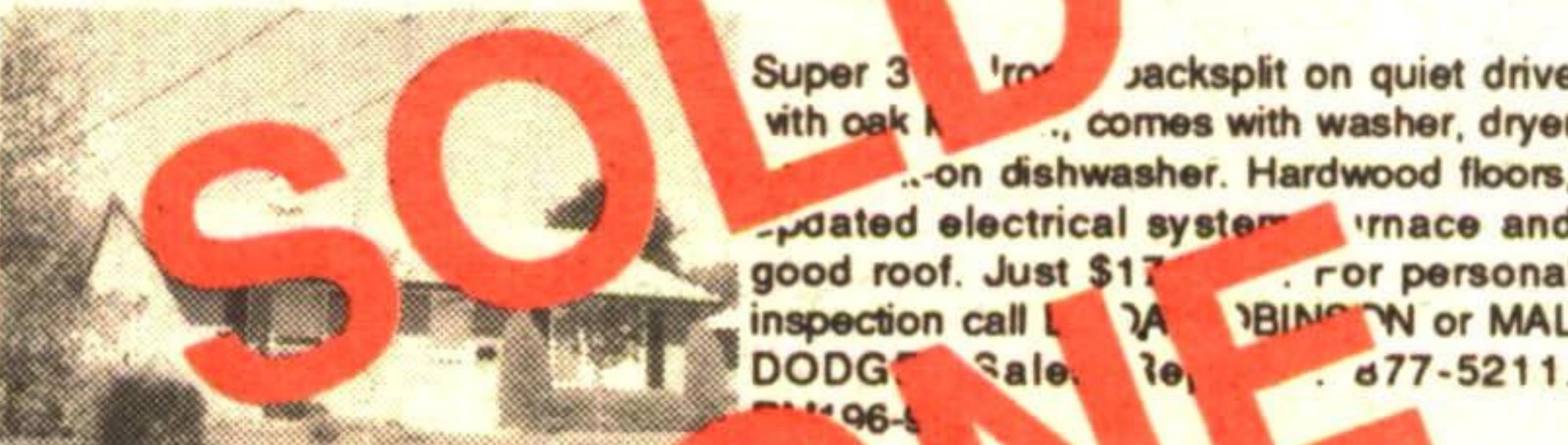
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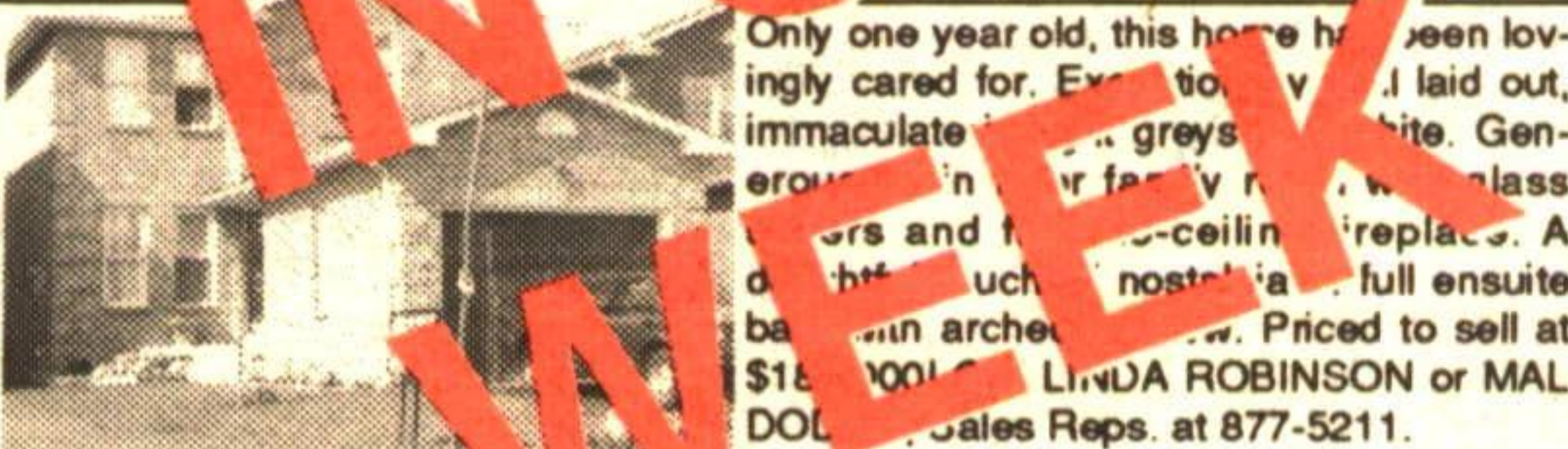
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